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DIGITAL DETOX STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING MENTAL HEALTH AND BEHAVIOUR

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ABSTRACT

Digital technology has become an essential part of modern life, providing opportunities for communication, education, entertainment, and professional activities. However, excessive or uncontrolled use of smartphones, social media, and digital platforms has raised concerns about mental health, sleep quality, attention, and everyday behaviour. Digital detox refers to the intentional reduction or temporary interruption of digital technology use to establish healthier habits and improve psychological wellbeing. This article examines digital detox strategies and their potential contribution to mental health and behaviour through a qualitative review of relevant scholarly literature. It focuses on screen-time management, notification reduction, scheduled device-free periods, social media breaks, sleep-related boundaries, and the replacement of excessive screen use with offline activities. Ramadhan et al. (2024) found that digital detox interventions significantly reduced depressive symptoms, although their effects on stress, life satisfaction, and overall mental wellbeing were not statistically significant. Ansari et al. (2024) also reported improvements in subjective and psychological wellbeing following digital detoxification, while highlighting differences across studies. The article argues that effective digital detox strategies should be realistic, individualized, and compatible with educational, professional, and social responsibilities. It concludes that balanced technology use, rather than complete digital avoidance, may provide a practical approach to supporting mental health and healthier behaviour.

KEYWORDS

Digital detox, mental health, digital wellbeing, screen time, smartphone use, behavioural change, psychological wellbeing, social media.

INTRODUCTION

Digital technology has transformed contemporary life by changing how individuals communicate, learn, work, and participate in social activities. Smartphones, social networking platforms, messaging applications, and online entertainment services provide immediate access to information and opportunities for interaction. Despite these advantages, excessive digital engagement has raised concerns about psychological wellbeing, attention, sleep, and daily routines. Digital detox has emerged as an approach through which individuals deliberately reduce or temporarily interrupt their use of digital devices and platforms. Radtke et al. (2022) reviewed research on digital detox interventions and found that their effects varied across health, wellbeing, social relationships, self-control, and performance. Their review demonstrates the importance of examining digital detox as a behavioural intervention rather than assuming that every reduction in screen time automatically improves mental health.Mental health includes emotional, psychological, and social wellbeing, influencing how individuals manage stress, regulate emotions, maintain relationships, and respond to everyday challenges. Excessive digital engagement may interfere with these processes when individuals experience persistent online distractions, social comparison, information overload, or difficulty disengaging from digital

activities. However, the relationship between technology use and mental health is complex because digital platforms can also provide education, social support, and access to useful services. Ramadhan et al. (2024) conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis of digital social media detox interventions and found a significant reduction in depressive symptoms, although statistically significant improvements were not observed in stress, life satisfaction, or overall mental wellbeing. These findings indicate that digital detox may benefit particular psychological outcomes without necessarily improving every dimension of mental health.

One important digital detox strategy involves managing screen time and establishing clear boundaries around device use. Individuals can monitor their daily usage, identify applications that consume excessive time, and establish specific periods for focused work, rest, and social interaction. These practices may help reduce habitual checking and improve awareness of digital behaviour. Ansari et al. (2024) examined digital detoxification through a systematic review and meta-analysis, reporting positive effects on subjective and psychological wellbeing across the included studies. Their findings support the potential value of intentional digital disconnection, while also indicating that outcomes can vary according to the intervention and the characteristics of participants. Screen-time management should therefore focus on the purpose and consequences of device use rather than imposing identical restrictions on everyone.Another important strategy involves reducing unnecessary notifications and limiting exposure to distracting applications. Frequent alerts can interrupt concentration, encourage repeated device checking, and make it difficult to maintain attention during academic, professional, or personal activities. Turning off non-essential notifications, removing distracting applications from the home screen, and using scheduled periods for checking messages may help individuals develop more deliberate technology habits. Radtke et al. (2022) identified a range of digital disconnection interventions and reported mixed outcomes across the studies reviewed. This suggests that practical strategies should be assessed in relation to the user's needs and everyday circumstances. Reducing interruptions may be particularly useful when digital distractions interfere with concentration, but users should retain access to essential communication and services.Sleep-related digital habits are another significant concern in discussions of mental health and behaviour. Using smartphones late at night may delay bedtime, interrupt sleep routines, and prolong exposure to stimulating content. Poor sleep can affect mood, concentration, and the ability to manage everyday stress. A digital detox approach can include keeping devices away from the bed, establishing a device-free period before sleeping, and avoiding unnecessary nighttime notifications. These practices aim to create a clearer separation between online activity and rest. The review by Radtke et al. (2022) identifies health and wellbeing as important outcomes in digital detox research, although the variation across studies means that the effects of individual strategies should not be overstated. Sleep-related boundaries are best considered part of a broader approach to healthier digital behaviour.

Digital detox may also influence social relationships and interpersonal behaviour. Excessive device use during conversations or shared activities can reduce attention to the people present and limit opportunities for meaningful face-to-face interaction. Device-free meals, outdoor

activities, in-person conversations, and shared family or friendship activities can help individuals redirect attention toward offline experiences. At the same time, complete disconnection may create difficulties for individuals who depend on digital communication for education, employment, accessibility, or social support. The systematic review by Radtke et al. (2022) found that digital detox interventions produced varied effects on social relationships and other outcomes. This evidence supports flexible approaches that reduce disruptive use while preserving the positive social functions of digital technology.The effectiveness of digital detox may also depend on personal motivation, self-regulation, and the availability of alternative activities. Individuals may find it difficult to reduce screen time when online engagement has become a routine response to boredom, stress, or uncomfortable emotions. Replacing habitual scrolling with exercise, reading, hobbies, outdoor activities, or direct social interaction may help establish more sustainable behavioural patterns. Ansari et al. (2024) reported improvements in subjective and psychological wellbeing following digital detoxification, although their findings also indicate that intervention outcomes should be interpreted in light of differences among studies. This suggests that successful digital detox should not be defined only by reduced device use. It should also consider whether individuals develop healthier routines, experience improved wellbeing, and maintain the changes over time.Digital detox is particularly relevant in educational and professional settings, where sustained attention and effective time management are important. Students may experience digital distractions while studying, whereas employees may find it difficult to disconnect from work-related messages outside working hours. Appropriate boundaries can help individuals separate focused activities from non-essential digital engagement. Nevertheless, technology restrictions should not interfere with necessary learning resources, workplace communication, or accessibility requirements. A scoping review by Digital Detox Strategies and Mental Health: A Comprehensive Scoping Review of Why, Where, and How (2025) identified differences in intervention methods and individual characteristics that may influence mental health outcomes. The review suggests that age, baseline mental health, usage patterns, and the duration of digital detox are relevant considerations when developing appropriate interventions.

The relationship between digital detox and mental health therefore requires a balanced interpretation. Although some studies report improvements in selected psychological outcomes, others find limited or inconsistent effects on broader wellbeing. The 2025 systematic review and meta-analysis by Gui et al. in Scientific Reports examined social media abstinence and reported that the effects on affective wellbeing and life satisfaction were not uniform across studies. These findings indicate that temporary abstinence is not necessarily beneficial for every individual or in every context. This article examines digital detox strategies through a qualitative review of scholarly literature, focusing on mental health, behavioural change, screen-time management, sleep, social interaction, and self-regulation. It aims to identify practical approaches that may encourage healthier technology habits while recognizing the continuing importance of digital participation in modern life.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the potential effects of digital detox strategies on mental health and psychological wellbeing.
2. To explore how digital detox practices influence attention, sleep, self-regulation, and everyday behaviour.
3. To identify practical digital detox strategies that promote balanced technology use and healthier behavioural patterns.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How can digital detox strategies contribute to improved mental health and psychological wellbeing?
2. How do digital detox practices influence attention, sleep, self-regulation, and everyday behaviour?
3. Which digital detox strategies may help individuals establish healthier and more balanced technology-use habits?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on digital detox has developed in response to growing concerns about excessive engagement with smartphones, social media, and other digital platforms. Digital detox generally refers to voluntary disconnection from digital devices or services for a particular period or through specific restrictions. Radtke et al. (2022) conducted a systematic literature review of digital detox interventions and found that their effects varied across health, wellbeing, social relationships, self-control, and performance. Their findings highlighted differences in how digital detox was defined and implemented, making it difficult to identify a single strategy that consistently benefits everyone. This research provides an important foundation for examining digital detox as a flexible approach to technology management rather than a universal requirement to avoid digital devices.Ramadhan et al. (2024) investigated the effects of digital social media detox on mental health through a systematic review and meta-analysis. Their analysis included ten studies and found a statistically significant reduction in depressive symptoms following digital detox interventions. However, the effects on life satisfaction, stress, and overall mental wellbeing were not statistically significant. These findings suggest that reducing social media use may benefit certain psychological outcomes, while broader improvements in wellbeing remain uncertain. The results also demonstrate why digital detox research should distinguish between different mental health outcomes rather than treating wellbeing as a single measure. The authors emphasized that digital detox may be useful as a targeted approach, but its effectiveness depends on the outcome being examined and the circumstances of the intervention. Ansari et al. (2024) examined digital detoxification and wellbeing through a systematic review and meta-analysis involving 26 eligible studies, with 18 included in the quantitative analysis. Their findings indicated positive effects on subjective wellbeing and psychological wellbeing, although the results varied across studies and intervention characteristics. These findings support the possibility that intentional digital disconnection can contribute to improved wellbeing for some individuals. However, differences

in study populations, intervention duration, and methodological quality must be considered when interpreting the results. The research suggests that digital detox should be designed around the needs and circumstances of individuals rather than implemented as an identical intervention for everyone. It also highlights the importance of evaluating positive psychological outcomes in addition to reductions in digital use.

Setia et al. (2025) conducted a comprehensive scoping review examining digital detox strategies and mental health. Their review identified research suggesting that digital detox may help reduce depressive symptoms and problematic internet use, while results for broader wellbeing and life satisfaction remained variable. The authors also highlighted the importance of individual characteristics, including age, baseline mental health, patterns of technology use, coping styles, and the duration of digital detox. These findings suggest that the effectiveness of digital disconnection depends on more than simply reducing screen time. A strategy that works for one person may be less appropriate for another because digital devices serve different educational, professional, social, and personal purposes. This literature supports the development of tailored approaches that balance reduced digital engagement with individuals' practical needs. Kolhe and Naik (2025) examined digital detox as a potential means of enhancing eudaimonic wellbeing, which emphasizes personal growth, purpose, autonomy, and meaningful living. Their systematic review considered cognitive benefits, emotional regulation, mindfulness, social connectedness, and behavioural change. The review suggests that digital detox may create opportunities for reflection, more deliberate attention, and engagement in meaningful offline activities. This perspective broadens the discussion beyond the reduction of negative psychological symptoms by considering how digital disconnection may support positive personal development. However, the reported benefits should be interpreted in light of differences in research methods and the range of interventions examined. The study provides a useful conceptual basis for considering digital detox as a means of creating a more balanced relationship with technology.Research on temporary social media abstinence provides a more cautious perspective on the effectiveness of digital detox. Lemahieu et al. (2025) conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis involving ten studies and 4,674 participants. Their findings showed no statistically significant overall effects of social media abstinence on positive affect, negative affect, or life satisfaction. These results indicate that temporarily avoiding social media does not necessarily improve wellbeing for every individual. A break from digital platforms may reduce certain distractions, but it may also limit access to social interaction or enjoyable online activities. The study emphasizes the need to distinguish complete abstinence from other strategies, such as reducing notifications, setting time limits, and changing specific usage habits. This evidence supports a flexible approach that focuses on how technology is used and whether it interferes with individual wellbeing. Setia et al. (2025) also emphasized that the effectiveness of digital detox may vary according to the setting in which it is implemented and the strategies used. Device restrictions, application controls, scheduled breaks, and alternative offline activities may serve different purposes. For example, reducing notifications may help individuals manage distractions while allowing them to retain access to essential communication. In contrast, a temporary social media break may be more suitable for someone who wants to reduce habitual browsing. The literature

suggests that digital detox strategies should be selected according to the specific problem being addressed, whether it involves sleep, concentration, emotional wellbeing, or time management. This approach can help individuals maintain the practical benefits of technology while reducing patterns of use that interfere with everyday functioning.

Overall, the reviewed literature indicates that digital detox may support selected aspects of mental health and psychological wellbeing, but its effects are not uniform across all outcomes. Some studies report reductions in depressive symptoms or improvements in subjective wellbeing, whereas others find no significant effects on positive emotions or life satisfaction. Differences in intervention methods, duration, individual circumstances, and measurement approaches may explain some of these variations. The present article brings these perspectives together to examine practical digital detox strategies and their possible influence on mental health and behaviour. It emphasizes the importance of individualized interventions, self-regulation, meaningful offline activities, and realistic expectations about what digital disconnection can achieve.

METHODOLOGY

This article adopts a qualitative, literature-based methodology to examine digital detox strategies and their potential effects on mental health and behaviour. Relevant scholarly publications were identified through topic-focused searches of Google Scholar and academic literature addressing digital detox, digital disconnection, social media abstinence, psychological wellbeing, mental health, screen-time management, and behavioural change. Priority was given to peer-reviewed journal articles, systematic reviews, meta-analyses, and scoping reviews published between 2023 and 2026, with earlier foundational studies included where relevant. Publications were considered according to their relevance to the research objectives, the clarity of their methods, and their contribution to understanding digital detox interventions and psychological outcomes. The selected literature was compared to identify recurring findings, differences in reported effects, and factors that may influence intervention effectiveness. Particular attention was given to screen-time reduction, social media breaks, notification management, sleep-related boundaries, self-regulation, and offline activities. The article does not involve original surveys, interviews, or experiments; therefore, its conclusions are based on the interpretation and synthesis of published research rather than newly collected participant data.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The study employs a qualitative narrative literature-review design to develop an understanding of digital detox strategies and their potential relationship with mental health and behaviour. This design is appropriate because digital detox involves several interconnected dimensions, including emotional wellbeing, attention, sleep, self-regulation, social interaction, and everyday routines. The review organizes the selected literature around these themes and compares findings from systematic reviews, meta-analyses, and conceptual studies. It considers both complete or temporary digital abstinence and more moderate strategies, such as application limits,

notification management, and scheduled device-free periods. Differences in study populations, intervention duration, and outcome measures are taken into account when interpreting the literature. Rather than testing a new intervention or establishing statistical relationships, the design provides a thematic interpretation of existing research and identifies approaches that may support healthier digital habits.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data analysis uses qualitative thematic synthesis to organize and interpret the selected scholarly publications. The reviewed evidence is grouped into themes concerning mental health, psychological wellbeing, attention, sleep, behavioural regulation, social interaction, and digital detox strategies. Within each theme, findings are compared to identify recurring patterns, differences in outcomes, and limitations in the available evidence. Reported benefits, such as reductions in depressive symptoms or improvements in subjective wellbeing, are considered alongside findings that show limited or no significant effects. The analysis also examines how intervention duration, individual circumstances, and the distinction between complete abstinence and moderate use may influence outcomes. Because the article is based on existing literature, no new statistical tests are performed and no original numerical dataset is analyzed. The findings therefore represent an interpretive synthesis of published research rather than results from a new empirical study.

FINDINGS

The reviewed literature indicates that digital detox may offer benefits for selected aspects of mental health, although its effectiveness varies across individuals and outcomes. The first major finding concerns depressive symptoms. Ramadhan et al. (2024) found a statistically significant reduction in depressive symptoms following digital detox interventions. This suggests that reducing social media engagement may help some individuals address patterns of digital use associated with psychological distress. However, the evidence does not establish that digital detox alone is sufficient to address depression, and it should not be regarded as a replacement for appropriate professional care when needed.

The second finding concerns broader psychological wellbeing. Ansari et al. (2024) reported positive effects of digital detoxification on subjective and psychological wellbeing in their meta-analysis. However, Lemahieu et al. (2025) found no statistically significant overall effects of temporary social media abstinence on positive affect, negative affect, or life satisfaction. These findings demonstrate that different digital detox approaches may produce different outcomes. Reducing excessive use may be helpful for some individuals, but a complete break from social media does not necessarily improve every aspect of emotional wellbeing.The third finding relates to attention and behavioural self-regulation. Digital detox strategies can encourage individuals to become more aware of habitual device checking, online distractions, and the time spent on digital activities. Scheduled breaks, application limits, and the reduction of unnecessary notifications may help individuals manage their attention more deliberately. Kolhe and Naik

(2025) discussed the potential relationship between digital detox, mindfulness, emotional regulation, and personal growth. The literature suggests that these strategies may be most useful when they help individuals develop sustainable habits rather than relying exclusively on short periods of abstinence.The fourth finding concerns sleep and daily routines. Excessive digital engagement, particularly when it continues late into the evening, may interfere with bedtime routines and reduce the time available for rest. Digital detox practices such as keeping devices away from the bed, setting a regular stopping time, and limiting nighttime notifications may help individuals establish clearer boundaries. Setia et al. (2025) identified sleep-related concerns and individual usage patterns among the factors relevant to digital detox research. However, the reviewed literature does not establish that every digital detox strategy produces the same improvements in sleep or mental health. Outcomes depend on the individual's habits, circumstances, and the nature of the intervention.

The fifth finding highlights the importance of individualized digital detox strategies. Setia et al. (2025) found that intervention outcomes may vary according to factors such as age, baseline mental health, usage patterns, and environmental pressures. Some individuals may benefit from a temporary break from selected platforms, while others may find moderate restrictions more practical. Students and professionals, for example, may need to retain access to educational resources, workplace communication, and essential services. These differences suggest that digital detox should be tailored to individual needs instead of being treated as a universal requirement to avoid technology.The sixth finding concerns the importance of maintaining meaningful offline activities. Digital disconnection may provide opportunities for exercise, hobbies, reading, personal reflection, and direct social interaction. These activities can help individuals use their time more intentionally and maintain a balance between online and offline experiences. Nevertheless, the evidence suggests that benefits cannot be guaranteed simply by reducing digital use. Radtke et al. (2022) reported varied effects across health, wellbeing, social relationships, self-control, and performance. Overall, the reviewed literature supports flexible, purposeful digital detox strategies while highlighting the need for further research into their long-term effects.

CONCLUSION

Digital detox has emerged as a practical approach to managing excessive digital engagement and promoting healthier technology habits. The reviewed literature suggests that intentional digital disconnection may improve selected aspects of mental health, particularly depressive symptoms, and may support psychological wellbeing under certain circumstances. However, the effects are not consistent across all outcomes, and temporary social media abstinence does not necessarily improve positive emotions or life satisfaction. These findings indicate that digital detox should be understood as a flexible behavioural strategy rather than a universal solution to psychological

difficulties.The article concludes that effective digital detox strategies should focus on the individual's needs, patterns of technology use, and everyday responsibilities. Screen-time management, notification reduction, scheduled device-free periods, sleep-related boundaries, and engagement in meaningful offline activities may help individuals establish healthier routines. Moderate and sustainable changes may be more practical for people who depend on digital devices for education, work, communication, or accessibility. Digital wellbeing should therefore be pursued by improving the quality and purpose of technology use rather than assuming that complete digital avoidance is necessary.Future research should examine the long-term effects of different digital detox strategies, identify which approaches work best for specific populations, and use reliable measures of actual technology use alongside psychological outcomes. Researchers should also distinguish between reducing excessive engagement and completely abstaining from digital platforms. In conclusion, digital detox may contribute to better mental health and healthier behaviour when it is implemented thoughtfully, adapted to individual circumstances, and combined with sustainable daily habits. A balanced relationship with technology can allow individuals to retain its benefits while reducing digital practices that interfere with psychological wellbeing.

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